DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 993 HE 000 208

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Beyond Ability.

California Univ., Berkeley. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education.
Pub Date 67
Note-5p.; Article in The Research Reporter; v2 n1 1967
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.35
Descriptors-Community Colleges, Dropouts, Family Environment, *Higher Education, *Motivation, Objectives, *Parental Background, *Persistence, Special Programs, *Students, Values
Identifiers-*Trent-Medsker study

Although many economic barriers to higher education in the US have been removed, many potential college students lack the will to seek a college degree. The 4-year Trent-Medsker study of some 10,000 high school graduates found that nearly 40% of the students able to enter college didn't and over 50% who did later withdraw and did not return during the study period. Of the students who started college, most entered local institutions, changed colleges at least once, and did not graduate within 4 years. Motivation to enter or persist seems to be most influenced by father's occupation, mother's education, general parental encouragement and cultural enrichment in the home. Dropouts and nonattenders saw the value of a college education in terms of vocational training and rejected ideological exploration whereas graduates viewed their education as the gaining of knowledge and appreciation of ideas and were inclined toward abstract, reflective thought. Programs are needed to develop these intellectual goals where they are lacking. To break some cycles of indifference to education, universities need not expend vast resources for there are potential students in the backyard of almost every college. To motivate bright students to enter or persist in college, either the students must learn to value a traditional education or colleges will have to become more relevant for more students. The provision of local colleges tuned to the needs of the community and attempts to strengthen the WILL for college are both fruitful means for bringing about universal higher education. (JS)

ED 023 947

BEYOND ABILITY

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THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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HE 000 208

The Research Reporter

The Center for Research and Development in Higher Education

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Volume II, Number 1, 1967

Beyond Ability

Who goes to college? What factors contribute to the decision? What is the influence of home and community? Ten thousand high school graduates help find the answers.

"Where there's a will, there's a way" has long been a cherished concept in America. And we have been especially eager to laud those whose determination to "get an education" has overcome all obstacles. Every schoolboy knows of Abraham Lincoln's heroic efforts to obtain an education, and there are still a few professors who like to tell today's relatively affluent graduate students about their own graduate days when, starving in an unheated garret, they managed to get their own higher degrees. From elementary school to graduate school, the *way* to education has become easier, and as we move toward maximizing the opportunity for higher education, our attention focuses upon the *will* of a democratic citizenry to obtain education. Enormous progress has been made in removing economic barriers to education, and as a nation we are determined that socioeconomic factors shall not be an obstacle to education at any level. Whereas a college education was once determined by the ability to pay the tuition, it is now popularly believed to be determined by the ability to do the work.

Recent research, however, indicates that it is not quite so simple. It comes as a surprise to many that, despite so much progress, socioeconomic barriers persist to a noticeable extent in American higher education. But it is now becoming apparent that the problem exists less in the "economic" than in the "socio." Now that the *way* to college is eased, attention is turned to the many who seem unable to find the *will*. In a society increasingly dependent upon an educated citizenry and committed to a national goal of universal higher education, educators need to know what factors inhibit the receptivity to education and sometimes lead to complete rejection.

In a four-year study of some 10,000 high school graduates, Leland Medsker and James Trent of the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education found that nearly 40 per cent of the students clearly possessing college ability (upper two-fifths of their high school graduating classes) did not enter college. Furthermore, over half of all students who did enter college later withdrew and did not return during the four years of the study.

Obviously, easing the way to college is but a partial answer to the goal of universal higher education. While we continue to expand the opportunities for higher education, we must devote further attention to an exploration of the question of the motivation of young people who might now go to college but who choose, for a variety of reasons, not to.

The Medsker-Trent data force us to ponder the question of how much "choice" there is in college decisions. Upon what does one's "will" for a education depend? One of the more sobering findings of the study was that the occupation of the father had somewhat more to do with college attendance than did the ability of the student. Whereas most students from upper socioeconomic families entered college regardless of ability, most students from lower socioeconomic strata did *not* enter college—again, regardless of ability. If a high school student's father worked at a high occupational level, his chances of going to college ranged from 84 per cent if he ranked in the top two-fifths of his class to 57 per cent if he fell in the lowest two-fifths in ability. On the other hand, the bright child of a father with low occupational status had only a 41 per cent chance of going to college; if he also had low ability, his chances for college fell to 20 per cent. Even when the students from families of lower occupational levels overcame initial barriers and entered college, the data showed that they tended to drop out with greater frequency. And they dropped out despite the fact that they appeared to have no greater academic or financial difficulties than their fellow students who persisted. What distinguished the groups was motivation—and the parents appeared to provide a prime source of academic motivation.

This extensive longitudinal study, supported by the U. S. Office of Education, was started in 1959 by selecting 16 communities which were similar in demographic and industrial features, but which differed in the type of public college avail-

Leland L. Medsker, Acting Chairman of the Center

able in the community. The high school graduates from these communities became the sample of 10,000 students whose college and non-college careers were followed through patterns of marriage, work, delayed entry into college, transfer to another college, graduation in four years, and continuation in college.

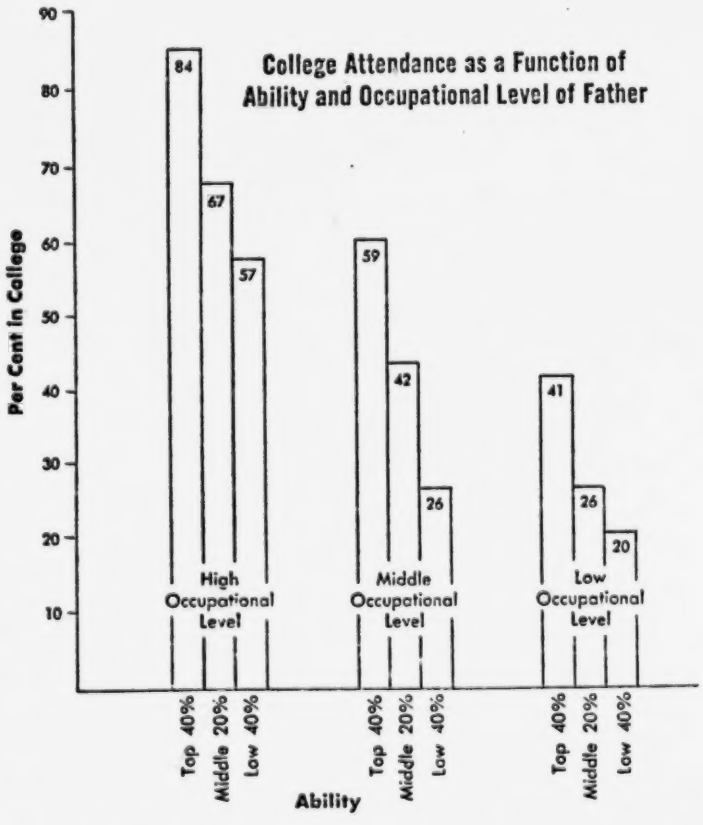
So much has been said and written about the scramble for higher education that many tend to think that the "pattern" for high school graduates in middle-class communities is to go away to college, spend four years on the quad, and emerge with a bachelor's degree. But the data revealed a quite different picture. Even today, most young people do not go to college—only 40 per cent of the Medsker-Trent sample were enrolled full time the semester after their high school graduation. Of those who started college, most did not "go away"—55 per cent entered local colleges. They did not spend four years on the quad—one-half dropped out and many changed colleges at least once. And they did not emerge "on time" with a bachelor's degree—28 per cent obtained their degrees in four years but almost as many (24 per cent) were still in college but had not yet qualified for a degree. In actual fact, only about 10 per cent of the original 10,000 graduated from college four years after high school graduation. These data lay to rest any stereotype of today's high school graduates as proceeding in orderly fashion from high school graduation through four years of college.

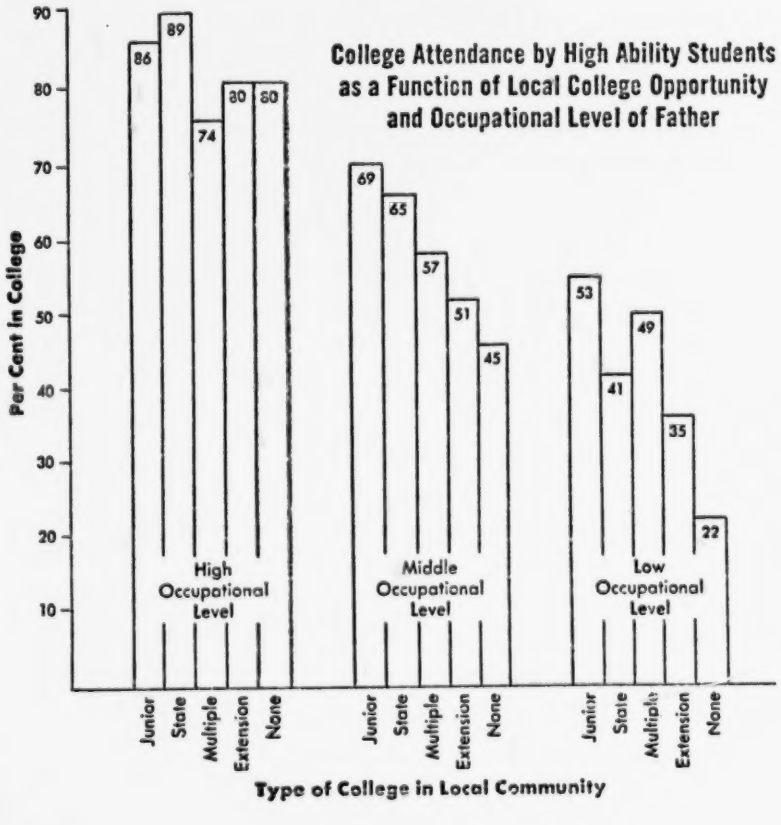
The postsecondary activities of the students varied as much as their backgrounds and interests. Nevertheless, certain factors emerged as being either conducive or not conducive to the completion of college. Of particular pertinence were the influences present in the home and the educational opportunities available in the community.

Although we speak of the rebellion of adolescence, and frustrated parents often feel that the best way to get a teenager to do something is to oppose it, the students' perception of their parents' attitudes toward college attendance had a definite—and positive—relationship to what paths the young people took. As seniors in high school, they were asked how important it was to their parents to have them attend college. Seventy per cent who subsequently persisted in college over the four-year period had stated that their parents definitely wanted them to attend. For the dropouts, the figure was 48 per cent, and for the bright (upper 30 per cent) high school graduates who did not attend college, only 15 per cent reported having received parental encouragement. When looked at in the total context of the research, it is clear that parental influence on college attendance is not something that suddenly appears when the student becomes a senior in high school. College graduates, for the most part, made their decision to attend college when they were in elementary school, whereas dropouts decided much later. Furthermore, the decisions apparently occurred in a complex of parental and student cultural and educational interests. The parents of eventual college graduates were reported by their children as having much broader interests in reading, music, and discussion of world affairs than were those of the dropouts or bright nonattenders. As a matter of fact, the amount of serious reading reportedly done by the parents had somewhat more influence on college attendance than did the amount of reading done by the students themselves.

In line with the hypothesis that the educational values and cultural enrichment in the home affects college attendance and persistence, was the finding that the mother's education was a very important factor—one of the few that was at least as influential as the father's occupation. Regardless of the level of fathers' occupations, far more students enrolled in college if their mothers had attended college. If the mother is, as the folklore maintains, the bearer of much of the cultural heritage, this finding lends further support to hypotheses about the central importance of the educational values expressed in the home.

The 60 per cent of the sample who did not attend college and the additional 25 per cent who started but withdrew showed quite different attitudes toward education than did those who persisted in college. The college graduates viewed the main purpose of education as the gaining of knowledge and the appreciation of ideas. The dropouts and able nonattenders, on the other hand, saw the value of a college education almost exclusively in terms of vocational training. Whereas the bright women who did not enter college did not regret





their decision four years later, almost half of the bright men felt that college would have been very important to them—not for general educational values, but for vocational training.

The utilitarian outlook of the dropouts and nonattenders was also reflected in their scores on the Omnibus Personality Inventory, a research instrument designed by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Berkeley to assess personality dimensions appropriate to the study of college students. Three of the scales of the OPI were combined into a scale reflecting the intellectual disposition of the student. High scores are obtained by those inclined toward abstract, reflective thinking, intellectual inquiry, and artistic experience. The college graduates in the sample were more likely to view such activities with favor than were the dropouts who, in turn, showed higher intellectual disposition than bright nonattenders. Startling is the fact that, as a group, the bright nonattenders scored higher than the eventual college graduates on tests of academic ability; they showed considerably less interest, however, in ideological and artistic exploration.

These OPI scores were consistent with the questionnaire data; both supported the inference that the home environment is a powerful determinant of young people's educational goals. Whereas tests of ability showed that numbers of college persisters, dropouts, and nonattenders had the academic ability to do college work, both the questionnaire responses and the measured student characteristics pointed to the appreciation of educational values as likely to be focally related to the pursuit of higher education.

The other scale that showed dramatic differences between the college and noncollege groups was the autonomy measure of the OPI. College students tended to be more flexible, open-minded, tolerant, and objective than did bright nonattenders. The scores of the dropouts fell between the eventual college graduates and nonattenders, but were closer to the nonattenders than to the graduates.

In the face of much criticism of education today, it is of some interest to note that, *as a group,* students scoring higher on these measures of tolerance, flexibility, open-mindedness, and intellectual curiosity are the ones who survive in our present system of higher education. This observation about the data is not meant to imply, however, that traditional higher education should be complacent about attracting and holding students who already possess some of the characteristics which we value in educated persons. All of us involved in higher education today know of many exciting and stimulating young people who drop out of college because they feel that traditional higher education does not challenge them to further fulfillment of their potential. On the other hand, we also know many students who obtain college degrees by simply accumulating the necessary grades and credits without ever experiencing the excitement of "education." In the words of Adlai Stevenson, ". . . universities have new tasks here—to produce students who are open to these wider possibilities and to stimulate the community around to awareness of the riches our civilization has to offer all those who, in truth, think 'learning a living' one of the great purposes of existence."

Research on the growth and development of students as they proceed through college is scanty and inconclusive.* The data in the Medsker-Trent report do indicate, however, that the students who come to the colleges today offer promising potential. The challenge is to attract new kinds of students to higher education and to maximize the development of those who stick with us. Higher education is just beginning to respond to the full range of student ability. It can do no less if the goal of universal higher education is to be achieved.

The data suggest several paths that action can take. We noted that the young people who have been exposed to cultural values in the home and who have developed certain educational appreciations are those most likely to be attracted to higher education. Hence, we might attempt to develop educational values where they are lacking. This is, of course, in part a goal of the programs for the culturally disadvantaged.

Knowingly or unknowingly these projects frequently apply the findings of this and similar research. Project Opportunity, for example, under the sponsorship of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the College Board, with the financial assistance of the Danforth and Ford Foundations, is attempting to "break the cycle of poverty" in which sons abandon education as their fathers and grandfathers had before them. If through concentrated attention to children now caught in desperately impoverished situations, Project Opportunity can intervene in the sorry familial sequence by extending the educational values and appreciations of this generation, there is research to support the hope that the cycle can be broken.

But the research also indicates that one need not have vast amounts of money and resources to break the smaller cycles of indifference to education. The students in the Medsker-Trent sample were not the children of city slums or isolated rural areas frequently described as the "culturally disadvantaged." Culturally disadvantaged, many seemed to be, but 91 per cent were white Caucasian children—only 3 per cent were Negro—and they were primarily from middle-sized midwestern communities, ranging in population from about 35,000 to 100,000. When compared with the rest of the country, the sample tended to be somewhat overweighted in the lower socioeconomic levels, but the communities showed a reasonable balance between white- and blue-collar workers, and the adult educational level was neither unusually high nor unusually low.

Many colleges with sincere convictions about their leadership role in social reform are giving special attention to programs for the disadvantaged. Certainly one can only applaud these efforts. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in such programs to think that the poorer the prospect, the more important the program. And one sees panic in the admissions office with a limited travel budget as it beats the backroads and city alleys for those sufficiently "disadvantaged" to warrant special attention. The results of the present study would indicate that there are also potential students in the backyard of almost every college—young people who might be helped by the more modest programs that many colleges and student groups are prepared to undertake. College students are already tutoring elementary and secondary school children in their local communities. Whereas the focus of most efforts has been upon the teaching of skills basic to education, this research would indicate that there are also broader lessons of educational values to be learned. The effectiveness of such programs remains to be evaluated, but meanwhile we can hope that new horizons are appearing for both "teacher" and student. In attempting to convey educational values and appreciations to others, this generation of college students may become clearer and more articulate about its own.

The fact that many able students are not surviving today's system of higher education is itself ample cause for concern. The largest proportion of dropouts in this study came from the top 30 per cent of the sample's ability distribution, and 40

* A second report on this Medsker-Trent sample covers four years of the graduates' post high school vocational experiences, educational patterns, and changes in values. (In preparation.)

James W. Trent, a project director at the Center

per cent of the brightest high school graduates did not even enter college. One way to motivate students to higher education is to effect those changes in them that will bring them to appreciation of what the traditional college has to offer. Another way is to change higher education so that it will take on greater relevance for greater numbers of young people. The two approachs are not incompatible.

In addition to educating youth in the habits of flexible thinking and the uses of intellectual power, higher education is also meeting the ever-increasing need, both of the times and the people, for vocational preparation. In recent years, the junior colleges have greatly expanded their occupational programs. Representing an important direction in American higher education, the community colleges are attempting to perform a new function for higher education and to serve a new segment of the population.

Of great significance for the understanding of the role of the junior colleges in higher education is some further data presented by the Medsker-Trent study. Mentioned earlier was the fact that the communities selected for study differed in one important respect. They offered different types of public higher education within the community. Five of the communities had public junior or community colleges, four had freshman-sophomore extension centers, four had relatively unselective state collges, and two had no public institutions at all. One, included for comparison purposes, was a metropolitan community which offered multiple public college opportunities.

As might be expected, the communities with the junior colleges had the most students going on to college, and the state college communities were next in order. The extension centers made the least impact on the local community; communities in which they existed showed about the same rate of college-going as did the communities with no college at all. The percentages of students entering college from the various communities offering different types of public colleges were: Junior college, 53 per cent; state college, 47 per cent; multiple colleges, 44 per cent; extension centers, 34 per cent; and no college, 33 per cent.

The type of college present in the community makes the least difference to bright students (upper 40 per cent) of high socioeconomic status. They go to college anyway; in the average community, 82 per cent of this group entered college. The impact of local opportunities for college is most vivid when we look at the high ability students across socioeconomic levels. Whereas 80 per cent of the bright youth from high socioeconomic backgrounds get to college even if there are none in the local community, only 22 per cent of the lower socioeconomic group of the *same level of ability* enter college when there are no local colleges. The presence of a junior college more than doubles the opportunity for bright students whose fathers work at lower occupational levels. In junior college communities, 53 per cent of the bright students from lower socioeconomic levels entered college, whereas in communities with no public college facilities, only 22 per cent of this group entered college. Between these extremes are multiple college communities with 49 per cent, state college towns with 41 per cent, and extension center localities with 35 per cent of the bright low socioeconomic youth going on to college.

The provision of local colleges tuned to the needs of the community is making easier the *way* to college; the attention to the values and appreciations of young people is expanding the *will* for college. Much has already been done in both areas; much remains to be done before universal higher education is a reality.

—K. PATRICIA CROSS

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Center Studies Accreditation Programs

The Center has received a grant from the United States Office of Education to pursue an exploratory study on the "Problems and Issues in Accredition by Specialized Agencies of Vocational-Technical Curricula in Post-Secondary Institutions." Increased demands for technical training, coupled with the proliferation of preprofessional subgroups has intensified the issue of accreditation by professional agencies. Furthermore, recent activity and legislation, at both the federal and state level, has added to the general problem.

The study, which is directed by Dr. Leland Medsker, assisted by Lloyd E. Messersmith, proposes to survey and to assess the basic issues reflected in questions, such as: To what extent is accreditation by specialized agencies a problem at this level? What are the basic elements of this problem? How is this accreditation related to the voluntary accreditation of two year colleges and technical institutes by regional accrediting associations? How is it related to the activities and responsibilities of the National Commission on Accrediting? What recent federal and state legislation has made accreditation by a specialized agency a prerequisite for participation in funding or program development? What effect does the problem of professional accreditation activity have on program development within the institution? What is the magnitude of institutional concern at this point in time as it relates to the general problem? What facets of this problem are in need of further study in depth?

The need for answers to such questions was first proposed by the American Association of Junior Colleges, and the project has received the endorsement of the National Commission on Accrediting, the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education, and the American Vocational Association.